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MAGAR-OT (S&A)

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SUBJECT: (6) Lessons Learned Number 36 - Fire and Maneuver (U) (8)

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1. (U) INTRODUCTION: The purpose of this <sup>report</sup> ~~Lessons Learned~~ is to emphasize the principles of fire and maneuver as applied at the unit level using organic fire support means and as applied by combined arms teams wherein artillery, mortars and aircraft fires are employed in support of attacking forces. These principles are valid for any type of warfare under any environmental conditions and are applicable country-wide to the counterinsurgency effort against the Viet Cong.

2. (CMHA) BACKGROUND:

a. In an offensive situation the general mission of an attacking force is to close with and destroy the enemy. Whether in a conventional or insurgency environment this mission is accomplished through the proper application of fire and maneuver: the degree to which either fire or maneuver is applied being dependent upon the situation and the resources available.

b. By definition, "fire and maneuver is the process of one or more units establishing a base of fire to engage the enemy, while another element or unit maneuvers to an advantageous position from which to close with and destroy or capture the enemy. The base of fire may consist of indirect supporting fires, direct fires, or a combination of both. The maneuvering force takes maximum advantage of existing cover and concealment along the maneuver route, and desirably approaches the enemy position from its flank or rear".

3. (CMHA) DISCUSSION:

a. Fire and maneuver is not being used by attacking friendly forces in operations against the VC except on infrequent occasions. Reports from US advisors and observers in the field consistently comment

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on this fact. These reports acknowledge that fire and maneuver cannot always be used in the same manner it would be for the attack of a fortified position or similar objective because of the elusive nature of the target; however, frequent occasions arise when fire and maneuver could and should be used. The following extracts from recent after action reports and other documents illustrate this conclusion:

(1) "The operation was timely and troops utilized were adequate for the mission. Failure to take action upon contact with the VC allowed the enemy to withdraw before the situation could be fully exploited to inflict maximum casualties. With timely, aggressive fire and maneuver the enemy could have been prevented from breaking contact . . . "

(2) "The platoon of 155-mm howitzers were used only on 3 December . . . airstrikes conducted on 3 December apparently had some effect, however the delay in waiting for a follow-up airstrike prior to an assault on the VC positions . . . allowed the VC to withdraw . . . "

(3) "Where enemy fire has halted the dismounted infantry, . . . habitually, the overall operation commander then calls for artillery fire and/or air strike(s). During the artillery and air strike the friendly forces remain halted in front of the enemy positions . . . if the VC elect to remain in position, they take cover with the knowledge that ARVN will not advance until after the fire support has lifted. ARVN uses artillery fire and air strikes as entities in themselves rather than support for ground action. They do not practice the maxim that supporting weapons facilitate the forward progress . . . not supplant it. The operations commander has consistently restricted movement during artillery fire support missions and air strikes . . . "

(4) "The enemy position was assaulted after sitting in full sight of the enemy for approximately 20 minutes . . . after occupying the position the ARVN force was held in place while artillery and air strikes were made on the fleeing VC battalion. Forceful and aggressive pursuit could and should have been effected."

(5) "In no known instances have armor units assaulted the VC under supporting artillery or mortar fire."

b. In contrast, extracts from similar reports citing proper usage of fire and maneuver techniques almost invariably illustrate that success results from such action.

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